

Hartman

SOLA SCRIPTURA

with

An evaluation of "The Lutheran Confessions and Sola Scriptura," from "Essays Adopted by the Commissioners of the American Lutheran Church and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, November 22-23, 1964, April 19-20, 1965"

and

A critique of sundry theological views on Sola Scriptura from contemporary American Lutheran Church sources

Our Lutheran Confessions, as the Commissioners' document helps us to see, are notable for their positive approach to basic Christian beliefs. At the same time, since they grew out of controversy within the church, they also contain much that is spoken in antithesis to positions and teachings which our Lutheran confessors believed were in violation of Scripture's clear teaching. The sola Scriptura principle remained always the decisive norm and rule.

We are committed to the same stance. Indeed, the peculiar service which the Lutheran church must render in this day of muddled theology is faithful adherence to this principle. This requires also that we recognize and repudiate positions or statements that fall short of the Scriptural standard, and no less so when the article of faith in question is Scripture itself.

The sola Scriptura principle is not only asserted by our Confessions. It is primarily and first of all taught by the Scriptures themselves. To unbelief this looks like circuitous reasoning, or begging of the question, but the believer in Christ recognizes that the Scriptures do have a distinct Bibliology. They tell us of themselves: what they are, how they came to be, whose authority they bear, what use and function they have, etc.

This testimony of Scripture about itself is our primary concern. Since, however, the Commissioners' essay on "The Lutheran Confessions and Sola Scriptura" is also to be examined critically, we shall append certain strictures where these seem justified. And finally, since fellowship with the American

Lutheran Church is pending and scheduled for action at the Denver convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, summer 1969, it will also be pertinent to cite theological viewpoints from recent American Lutheran Church sources which run counter to our Confessional position and which should, therefore, give us pause. It need hardly be stated that there is also much in and from American Lutheran Church sources which could be cited to demonstrate that at many places there is also happy agreement with our position, also on the article of Scripture. Over this we rejoice. But there is no need to repeat what is obvious and ought to be self-evident.

1.

God's Word is not only contained in the Scripture; Holy Scripture is God's Word and coincides with it, all objections of human reason to contrary. What Jesus said in Mark 7, 10.13, where He identifies what Moses had said and written with the Word of God is a truth consistently borne out in the Scripture, particularly as the New Testament writers attest that everything related in the Old Testament is reliable and true because it is divine, of God, God's Word.*

For Luther—and our Confessions are imbued with the same spirit—this is the heart of the whole matter. Either Scripture is God's Word in fact, or we are supposing a "Word" behind the Word. This Luther would never buy. It was never a case of the word of Moses, Isaiah, Paul, or Matthew, or one word over against another, but it was throughout the Word of God. In childlike trust,

*Cf. John 10,35; Gal.3,16; Heb. 3,7 (cf. Ps. 95,7.8); 2 Peter 1,21; Rom. 3,2; 1 Peter 1,11 (the prophets study their own book; thus it did not originate with them; and what is true of the Old is true also of the New Testament - cf. 2 Peter 3,15.16); 1 Cor. 14,37; Gal. 1,8.9; 1 John 1,1-4; 1 Thess. 2,13.

therefore, Luther felt that we must receive it just as our Savior did, and he quoted instances like Matt. 4,4; 7,10; Luke 24,44; John 10,35; etc. Commenting on Psalm 22,7, Luther stated:

The Holy Scripture is the Word of God, written and (as I might say) lettered and formed in letters, must as Christ is the eternal Word of God cloaked in human flesh. And just as Christ was thought of and dealt with by the world (in der Welt gehalten und gehandelt), so is the written Word of God too." (WA 48, 31,4; St.L IX, 1770)

Luther's point is very plain: even as we dare not despise the Lord who reveals Himself in the likeness of the sinful flesh (the most wonderful of the larva Dei or "coverings"), so we dare not show disrespect for Holy Writ for it is His divine Word. In his Confession Concerning Christ's Supper, Luther takes issue with the Silesians for speaking of the Word of God as something different from the external Word. (LW 37, 293)

It is good to note how Luther, in keeping with Scripture, correctly names both the Scriptures and Christ the Word of God. For reasons that are very plain in Scripture, as it treats of the inspired written Word and of the incarnate Lord, it is not a case of either/or, but both/and.

In Point No. 1 of its four affirmations the Commissioners' essay states that "the Scriptures are God's address to man," etc. Indeed, they are this, but they are much more. In view of neo-orthodoxy's refusal to state categorically that Scripture is the Word of God, or Scriptures are the revelation of God, we have to state it plainly and unequivocally. We must face the fact that liberal, neo-orthodox theologians speak of Scripture as God's Word in existential manner only, that is, it may become God's Word under certain circumstances, or God's Word may sound through it. Never do they speak of Scripture ontologically as the Word of God, that it is indeed by its very nature and being the actual Word of God.

Thus they set what they prefer to call its dynamic character over against what they brand a mere static conception. This is Bultmann's Anrede, or "address," God's Word through Scripture. In view of this threat the Commissioners' essay is to be faulted in that it ends up chiefly explaining Scripture's function and fails to define in unmistakable terms what Scripture is!

Such definition becomes all the more imperative in the present fellowship discussions in view of what is being said and written in American Lutheran Church circles. Prof. Theodore S. Liefeld, writing in The Bible: Book of Faith, a resource book in the American Lutheran Church's Leadership Education Series, denies in the chapter on "Revelation" that the Bible itself is objectively revelation. "We cannot do justice, he states, "to God's working by limiting the idea of revelation solely to the content of the book, the Bible, for it is not revelatory for any of us until we have heard Him speak and have been brought into the presence of the God of Scripture." (p.29) Rather as "a book of witness to the saving acts of God ... than a book of intellectual truths about which we divisively argue," (p.31) is the way we ought to think of the Bible.

This same stance is held throughout the book by various authors. It is an obvious commitment to neo-orthodoxy's way of calling the Bible the "Word of God," and yet not actually meaning that it is the Word of God in fact. The fact that this book was prepared for, and thus carries the endorsement of, the Board of Parish Education and the Board of Publication of the American Lutheran Church is evidence that here we are not dealing with an isolated instance of a questionable position but with a theological position generally held within that church and with its approval.

Inspiration is Scripture's own way of accounting for the fact that it is the Word of God. It is the agency or means by which God, as principal cause, produced in writing His Holy Word through chosen prophets and apostles. As His special instruments they plainly did not perform this work on their own initiative, nor as automatons, but as individuals who were God's personal organs writing under His prompting and recording what He wanted written. While, on the one hand, we detect in this God's delicate regard for the integrity of each individual and his personal gifts in writing, so that they did not write automatically or under coercion, we note also, on the other hand, such prompting and actuating by God that the Word itself was in fact, finally and throughout, God's Word.*

Because of inspiration, therefore, the Scriptures are the book written by the Holy Spirit. "Every word of Scripture comes from the revealed God," is the way Luther put it. (LW 12, 352) It was "spoken through the Holy Ghost." (St.L. III, 1895) In Luther's book, as well as his spiritual heirs' thinking, the Confessors of 1580, plenary and verbal inspiration were the very ground and basis of the sola Scriptura principle. No man, no matter how deft his dialectical tippytoeing, can claim the latter while yielding the former. Even Althaus has to admit, though he does so regretfully, that Luther was bound to the literal and plenary inspiration of Holy Writ, the objective fact of it being "inspired in its entire content by the Holy Spirit," even to its very words. (Theology of Luther, p. 50 f.) Luther's stance was precisely that of the Confessions of the Lutheran church.

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Cf. 2 Tim. 3,16; Matt. 1,22 ("of the Lord by the prophet"); Rom. 1,2; 2 Peter 1,19-21; 1 Peter 1,11.12; Mark 13,11; Luke 12,12; Gal. 1,11; Jer. 30,2; 1 Cor. 2,13; 14,37; 2 Peter 3,15.16.

The Commissioners' essay on "The Lutheran Confessions and Sola Scriptura" may be said to have given tacit support for this same position, it is true. But the document could have been much more explicit about it, especially on the subject of the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture, and the factor which this truth is in Scripture's own accounting for its divine authority.

"In what sense are the Scriptures the Word of God?" is a question often posed today. Obviously it could be a good question and a good answer could be given, as our Confessions do, and as the Commissioners' essay also does. But we would be naive, if we did not recognize that today, more often than not, it is a question which intends to throw an element of uncertainty into the arena concerning the relative importance and inspiration of some parts of Scripture, or the whole of it. It is a qualifying question, and a qualifying, ambivalent, not to say ambiguous, answer is looked for.

Some of this strange ambiguity is evident in the thinking of Prof. Warren Quanbeck when he strains at the authority of Christ in the church over against the authority of Holy Scriptures. Notice the false dichotomy he sets up between the two and his undercutting of Scripture's teaching on inspiration in the following statement from "A Dialogue on Authority and Inquiry - The Lutheran Understanding of Authority," a paper presented at the 53rd annual convention of the National Lutheran Educational Conference meeting in Los Angeles, January 15-16, 1967:

Lutherans may also acknowledge the fact that in spite of the Reformation's insistence that only Christ is absolute in the church, Lutherans have fallen into the snare of absolutizing the relative, the very error we recognize so quickly and reject so promptly when others make it. At various times in our history we have absolutized the scriptures by a theory of inspiration which removed them

from the realm of the historical and contingent. We have then been rightly reproached for substituting a paper pope for the Roman Pontiff.

It would be easy to say, as some have argued, that Prof. Quanbeck's view of Scripture out to be dismissed as an isolated instance of one theologian's view of Scripture and inspiration. Easy, that is, if he were not one of the most influential voices within the contemporary American Lutheran Church, and one most often called upon by its leaders to speak at conclaves in this country and abroad. We are no longer dealing with the American Lutheran Church (or its constituent parts) of five, or three, or even two, decades ago, but with a new breed. Clearly Prof. Quanbeck speaks at least for a large bloc of present-day clergy within the church, if not indeed for all of them. His views on Scripture are clearly contrary to both Scripture itself and our Confessions, in that he denies that Scripture is a final authority in matters religious, terming it "relative," and in labeling inspiration a "theory."^{*}

3.

Scripture's authority in matters of Christian theology stems directly from the fact that it is the inspired Word of God. Hereby it asserts an authority which belongs to God Himself, its author.[#] In this avouchment it is self-authenticating and depends neither upon ecclesiastical endorsement or "theorizing," nor upon scientific investigation. The Christian believer does

^{*}Cf. Luke 24,25-27; Is. 8,19.20; 1 Cor. 14,37; Acts 17,11; 2 Tim. 3,16; John 10,35.

[#]Cf. Luke 24,25-27; John 10,35; Matt. 4,4-7; 1 Cor. 14,37.

not require the latter (though the Bible readily fends for itself under scrutiny), and the unbeliever arbitrarily opposes all evidence, internal and external.

"The Word, the Word must do it," thundered Luther against the Schwaermer. (WA 18, 117,3) Already at Worms, when he stated, "My reason is captive to the Word of God," he acknowledged and testified for the Knechtsgestalt that every Christian theologian must have vis-a-vis' Scripture. He must be bound by its authority unquestioningly.

Right here, on Scripture's normative authority (auctoritas normativa) Luther and the Lutheran confessors of 1580 part company with most modern theologians. While the latter lay claim to insights into the judgments over Scripture which transcend its evident sense, Luther admonishes: "Do the Holy Spirit the honor of admitting that He is more learned than you, for so you are to deal with Scripture that you think God Himself is saying this." (WA 12, 440) This was true, of course, for every article of faith, all of which rested on passages so clear that none could contest them;* and it was true as well on all other matters where Scripture spoke. Scripture's doctrines might be obscure and difficult, especially to the canons of human reason, but that Scripture taught them, none could deny, for they were taught so clearly. The Confessions have precisely the same mind as Luther on this point.

The normative authority of Scripture, which commands respect and dutiful acceptance, does not conflict with but coalesces with Scripture's causative power or authority (auctoritas causativa), by which faith is drawn forth in the heart of the believer.† On both counts Scripture speaks of itself as God's

*See Apol. IV, 33 with reference to verses of Scripture that establish teaching and doctrine: "These testimonies are so manifest that to use the words of Augustine which he employed in this case, they do not need an acute understanding but only an attentive hearer."

†Note how Luther ties them together in his Large Catechism (Part V, 31). Speaking concerning the Lord's Supper's benefits under the Word, Luther asks: "Whence do they know of it, or how can they apprehend and appropriate to themselves the forgiveness except they lay hold of and believe the Scriptures and the Gospel?"

revelation. The hearing which leads to repentance and faith is not apart from the external Word but in and by its light and power through the Holy Spirit. While not all that is contained within the Scriptures is to be conceived as proclaiming directly the message of salvation, it is, of course, for this reason, and this alone, that it was given. Thus, as Luther put it: "The whole Scripture is concerned with provoking us to faith; now driving us with precepts and threats, now drawing us with promises and consolations. Indeed, whatever things are written are either precepts or promises; the precepts humble the proud with their demands, the promises exalt the humble with their forgiveness." (WML II, 291) When we, therefore, speak of the efficacious Word of God, we dare not separate or distinguish this somehow from the external Word itself.* The external written Word, reminds Luther in the Smalcald Articles, is the only safeguard "against the enthusiasts, i.e., spirits who boast that they have the Spirit without and before the Word, and accordingly judge Scripture or the spoken Word, and explain and stretch it at their pleasure." Luther adds his verdict: this is "nothing but sheer enthusiasm." (SA III, VIII, 3)

Now let us turn again to the Commissioners' essay on Scripture.

In Thesis III of that document it is stated:

The Lutheran Symbols are far more interested and explicit in stressing the dynamic character of the Scriptures here and now as the vehicle of the Deus Loquens ("God speaking") than in the accepted fact of the Deus Locutus ("God who has spoken"). There is a truly massive emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the Scriptures.

This is a proper emphasis no doubt always, but it would appear to be entirely unwarranted and unprovable that the Confessions really ever emphasize one over the other, that is, the causative over the normative authority of Holy Writ.

*Cf. Luke 24,44-48; Acts 17,11.12; 18,28.

This is borne out by the quotation from the Smalcald Articles, which the Commissioners' essay itself contains, where Luther states that none receives the grace of God "except through or with the external Word which comes before."

Again, for the same reason, when the Commissioners' essay chooses to speak of Scripture's identification with God, in order to impress its authority, it would be much clearer and more in line with customary usage were Scripture simply identified as the divine Word of God, and if, in addition, it were stated, in keeping with the causative and normative authority of God in His Word, that, when the Scriptures speak, we may be sure God Himself is speaking. Thus it is really more than that "God uses the Scriptures" as "His address to mankind." They are His Word, divine, authoritative, dynamic, powerful, faithful, saving!

So, too, when the document states, "Whatever the Scriptures are and effect, they are what they are and do what they do because of God's presence in and operation through them," it is necessary first of all to state that they are what they are and do what they do, because of what God in the first place has made them, as the God who has spoken (Deus locutus) and who still speaks through them (Deus loquens). The objective fact of their divine inspiration underlies everything here!

In this connection, it must be stated that a curious comparison, not to say un-Lutheran and un-Scriptural, is set up in the Commissioners' essay with the proposition: "Only from the perspective of sola Gratia can one properly speak of sola Scriptura in the sense of the Lutheran Symbols." Let it be said here that, as far as the Lutheran Confessions are concerned, this theological truism is also reversible!! An unwarranted grading of the "solas" is made implicit here by the cast of the sentence.

Closely connected with Scripture's authority is also the matter of its perspicuity and clarity, both of which are so basic in its proper interpretation. We do not propose to probe here the whole hermeneutical question. A comment is in place, however, in connection with the Commissioners' essay as it presses home the Law/Gospel principle for proper interpretation of Scripture. This may be rightly understood, of course. However, it might also be misunderstood, and, in fact, be misused by some under certain circumstances. For example, it has led to the denial, or at least shelving, of some of Scripture's own content on the grounds that these things, viz., geographical, historical, biological, or similar matters are not involved in the Law/Gospel syndrome, and therefore not finally and ultimately important in theological discussion.

The question then seems apropos: do we thereby introduce a "superior" analogy of faith, which supersedes Scripture's first and customary one, that articles of faith and doctrines are established by the clear verses of Scripture which appertain thereto, whether Law or Gospel, or their proper distinction, enter the picture or not?*

The principle of the careful distinction and relation between Law and Gospel which Scripture introduces and makes basic to all interpretation is its own. It dare never be used against Scripture itself in any way which would detract from or delimit its teaching, also not on matters which do not directly relate to its central teachings on what God has done for man's salvation.

Luther, we know, scored Erasmus bitterly for opting to be skeptical with the Holy Spirit's book. Especially did he detest the pious maneuver of turning the article on Christ into a Christ-monistic artifice whereby certain

*The Confessions specify which passages the Law/Gospel distinction "explains" (Apol. III, 64) There is no hint here that the principle allows license to allegorize Genesis, for example. "The adversaries have managed well if we permit ourselves to be overcome by allegories," states the Apology (XXIV, 35)

teachings of Scripture, and Scripture itself, were lowered or discredited. Then he was ready to reverse his famous dictum that "if the adversaries press the Scriptures against Christ, we urge Christ against the Scriptures" (LW 34, 122) and say: "Stick to the Word of God. Ignore every other -whether it is devoid of Christ, in the name of Christ, or against Christ, or whether it is issued in any other way." (LW 22, 451) This would apply, e.g., against all who attempt to use his formula, was Christum treibet, in a wrongful way, as a selective tool on Scripture's contents rather than an interpretive key for unlocking Scripture's meaning correctly. Erasmus has many modern counterparts after all, theologians who speak piously of their "Jesus religion" or "Christology," but who really deny the Lord because they deny His Word.

* * *

The inerrancy of Scripture is a subject closely connected in any discussion of its authority, whether normative and/or causative. It is really the crux of the matter when verbal inspiration is being asserted. And were it merely a pious opinion or deduction, we might, I suppose, take Barth's advice to heart and "forthwith resolve to have done a battle that once had its time but has now had it."

(The Word of God and the Word of Man, 61) "Many people think they believe this," says Dodd derisively (The Authority of the Bible, 10) but "the Bible itself does not make any claim to infallible authority for all its parts." (Ibid., 15) Yet the same writer feels compelled to state that there is a "numinous" effect which Scripture produces upon him, an effect which he defines as "simply a sense of the uncanny." (Ibid., 38)

Luther faced the issue and we should face it too, with bold and dutiful candor, and with trusting confidence. On the question of whether we can believe the Genesis account of woman's creation from the rib of Adam, Luther asserted: "We dare not give preference to the authority of men over that of Scripture! Human beings can err, but the Word of God is the very wisdom of God and absolutely infallible truth." (LW, 22)

For Luther, as I think it must be for us, to imply that Scripture contained error was not only contrary to what the Scripture itself testified concerning its own inerrancy in passages like 2 Tim. 3, 16; John 10, 35; et al., but, above all, an insolent affront to God who first gave it. He was perfectly aware of many of Scripture's so-called "errors," but he was unwilling to be budged one inch from what Scripture witnessed of its infallibility. Moreover, he even anticipated by centuries the maneuver which casts the reliability of Scripture in relative terms: absolutely and infallibly right in all matters pertaining to its saving proclamation, but fallible and subject to the usual human foibles on other matters not central to salvation. Luther insisted, on Scripture's own evidence, that it must be an absolute inerrancy, no matter with what difficult problems our human reason might be

left. Dare we do less?*

In passing, we note that C. F. W. Walther caught Luther's thinking exactly, when years later he warned:

Beware, beware, I say of this "divine-human Scripture." It is the devil's mask. For eventually it constructs such a Bible after which I would not wish to call myself a Bible Christian. . . . For if I believe that the Bible contains errors, then it is no longer a touchstone for me, but needs a touchstone itself. In short, it is unspeakable what the devil tries with the "divine-human Scripture." (CTM, XXXII, Nov. 1961, 674.)

Walther never entertained, as little as do we, any notion about the sacred Scriptures falling down to earth like some miraculous bundle from on high. There was nothing mechanical about their origin. Nor were they to be explained through a series of deus ex machina episodes. But the fact simply was as Luther put it for us, referring to the evident human side of the Scriptures: "Although they were also written by men, they are not of men nor from men, but from God." (WML II, 454) This means that, while the Scriptures are in every way and throughout a production by human authors, they are at the same time in every way and throughout the result of God's authorship. To assume that they are also faulty and given to error because they have a true human side is as wrong as to teach that there was sin in Jesus because He had a human mother and a true human nature.

In turning now to the commissioners' essay on Scripture and the Confessions, we note in Thesis II a proper emphasis on the reliability of the sacred text with quotations like the following from the Formula of Concord:

At least believe in Scriptures. They will not lie to you."
Here we take our intellect captive in obedience to Christ,
as we do in other articles also, and accept this mystery in
no other way than by faith and as it is revealed in the Word.

*The Confessions reprove people who accept what "agrees with reason and treat the rest as mythology." (Apol. VII & VIII, 27) When in the same paragraph the true church is spoken of as not erring, the reference here, as elsewhere in the Symbols (cf. Apol. IV (II), 83; XII, 65-67; XX, 79.80), is to the prophets and the apostles, God's inspired spokesmen.

Obviously, in the thinking of the Lutheran confessors, the inspired, divine character and authority of Scripture included also the absolute infallibility of the Holy Scriptures as God's Word. It would appear that here was the golden opportunity for the commissioners to enlarge on the whole troubling question of Scripture's inerrancy as long as the quotations themselves, drawn from the Lutheran Confessions, express this underlying confidence and trust in Scripture.

The statement in the commissioners' essay, Thesis III, that "the Scriptures as the Word of God provide the church with the adequate, reliable, and efficacious means for her work" is a fine affirmation which we gladly underscore and applaud. But one would have to be extremely naive not to recognize that it is language which would hardly cause liberals to twitch and twitter, for the simple reason that it leaves them undisturbed with their ideas of an approximate or general adequacy or reliability of Scripture. For most of these, after all, the "Word of God" is still something that must come from beyond and behind the curtain of Scripture. Therefore, a plain, unequivocal avowal of full sufficiency and inerrancy, as Scripture's proper God-given attributes, seems to be indicated and called for here. Needless logomachy does the church no good, we know (cf. 2 Tim. 2,23), but still worse is pussyfooting which surrenders sound doctrine (2 Tim. 1,13).

It is to be doubted that a statement like the following, taken from Thesis III of the commissioners' essay,

It should be noted that while the confessions do not deny the infallibility of the Scriptures as a whole, they make explicit reference to this attribute in contexts that are associated specifically with the Gospel, as all citations above but the last indicate,

really can be said to reflect fairly the thinking of the Confessions.*

*It is bothersome that the commissioners' essay persists in using a lower case "c" with reference to the Confessions. Since the Lutheran

Granting that the question of inerrancy was not uppermost in the minds of those responsible for the Confessions, was not this their reasoning: Since the Scriptures are indeed God's inspired, inerrant Word, they do not lie or deceive, particularly not on the fundamentals, the articles of faith that pertain to our salvation! This is not a debatable point, not from the side of the Confessors, and the commissioners' essay would have done well to state it very plainly, much more plainly than with a small appendage concerning the Scripture's reliability. This does not actually and accurately express the thinking of the Confessors.

In this connection we do well to draw the following statement of the commissioners' essay in Thesis II under closer scrutiny:

Whatever in the extra-Biblical tradition proved itself useful in the service of the Gospel was gratefully retained, and, if necessary, purified in the light of the Gospel. Whatever could not be made to conform to this criterion was rejected.

Unquestionably there have been benefits from extra-Biblical sources, linguistic science, archaeology, inscriptions, to mention a few. Luther, the Confessors, and we also are frank and happy to recognize these. Also, in connection with their use, it goes without saying that the central article of the faith, the Gospel, has to be served and safeguarded. But is it a sufficient explanation of the Confessors' viewpoint to state that "whatever could not be made to conform to this criterion was rejected"? Extra-Biblical matters stand not merely under the Gospel's judgment, when it comes to their validity, but under the Scripture's first of all. Nor do the Confessions ever really divide this question, one authority over against the other; they view them as one, without implying that the Gospel

Confessions are meant, the capital "C" is certainly allowable by literary style and usage. We trust nothing more is meant and that no deference is being shown to those who resist the norma normata station of the Symbols. One has to be aware of how liberals also insist on using a lower case "s" when referring to Scripture!!

is the Scripture. So many "gospels" were abroad in Luther's day, in the Confessors', already in the apostles', and so also in ours, that only the infallible, written Word of God could and should rule. Not even the Gospel will finally be safe, if extra-Biblical traditions are allowed a foothold over against Scripture's inviolable authority. Therefore, what the Confessions themselves aver, and as the commissioners' essay itself quotes, is that "other symbols and writings are not judges like Holy Scripture" and "the Word of God (the reference is to the external Word, Scriptures) is and should remain the sole rule and norm of doctrine."

Surely everyone is aware that the extra-Biblical activity most in evidence in our day is the higher critical method of judging Scripture's text and the historical critical method which sits over Scripture's content and meaning. Both have become more real as a threat for Lutherans in this country through the advent of neo-orthodoxy. Neo-orthodoxy, we know, has a definite Biblical emphasis. Be this as it may, we know also that it has retained solid commitment to and dependence upon the so-called scientific approach to theological study, especially as regards the Scriptures themselves.

Now fellow Lutherans, who have adopted this viewpoint, softly - shall we say, condescendingly, because of our apparent theological backwardness? - chide us, for not getting with it, as does Prof. Quanbeck:

For those nurtured in absolutizing ways of reading the Bible or the confessions, the initial encounter with historical scholarship may indeed be a kind of shock, but those who stay with it can testify that it is one of God's gifts to our times, to enable us to hear His Word with clarity and power. (Op. cit., 51)

Of course, the sluice gates are not all the way open yet, and so we are urged to limit such scientific and scholarly efforts to

the so-called "human form of the witness to revelation," as Prof. Weiblen puts it, because this is "rightly subject to honest critical investigation." (Bible: Book of Faith, 146)

May we be permitted a return question? After they have excogitated a Bible after their own liking will they also excogitate a Christ in the same way too? These are Siamese twins in theological gerrymandering. The facts of history are not otherwise.

In this connection, hands of holy horror have again and again been raised by this school of thinking about the so-called Docetic-Monophysite heresy, of which those are supposedly guilty who contend for Scripture's inspired nature in plenary, verbal, inerrant way.* The supposition is that the latter must obviously be committed to a thought-process on the miracle of inspiration which denies the human side of Scripture's origin and supposes that God somehow dropped it into the lap of His church by some divine hocus-pocus. Prof. Quanebeck is one of the chief promulgators of this charge and he reasons:

Any doctrine of Scripture which denies or abridges the fully human character of the Bible is a danger to the Gospel of the church. . . . For just as the revelation of God is given in the human being Jesus of Nazareth so also the Word of God is given through the historical witness of men in the Bible. (A Reexamination of Lutheran and Reformed Traditions, 1964, 24).

Here in answer, following Walther, who followed Luther, let us remind very earnestly: the threat of Nestorian, not to say dynamic Monarchian, thinking on the divine-human character of Scripture (if we may be permitted a counter-analogy) is much more real, even as it is in our day also on the divine-human person of our Lord!!

*The fact that this heresy (heresies) had nothing directly to do with Scripture's inspired, inerrant nature does not deter them from using what appears to be a formidable barb.

Is not the question which those are asking who doubt the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture through human hands really this: Are these Scriptures really and throughout the Word of God? And once they refuse Scripture's own assertion here concerning itself, is not the next threat for them that they won't be able any longer to answer the question, "What think ye of Christ, whose Son is He?" correctly either?

Inerrancy used to be a perfectly respectable term among Lutherans in describing Scripture's infallible nature. Today, however, the term has virtually become one of embarrassment to Lutherans. So much so, that now not those who deny it are made to feel uncomfortable, but those who support it. A strange turn of events for those committed to the Lutheran Confessions!

It might be well at this point simply to pile up a list of troubling questions or statements on this subject which stem from American Lutheran Church sources, since it is with this church that Missouri proposes fellowship.

- 1) Pres. Fred A. Schiotz, addressing himself directly to the matter in an address or article on "The Church's Confessional Stand Relative to the Scriptures," makes it very plain that "Scripture's teaching of inspiration does not require a commitment to textual inerrancy" and to prove his point he draws on the same hazardous divine-human analogy of Quanbeck, cited above. He goes one step further: it is a virtual denial of theologia crucis to speak of Scriptures as a "perfect book" and

Our desire to have a book that we may speak of as perfect must be crucified and faith must be ready to receive what the book as a means brings to us, namely, the Gospel of Christ.

President Oliver Harms has sought to soften the impact of President Schiotz' position stating that one must understand the context in which it was given. Even after one has done this, however, the answer is the same: Dr. Schiotz does not accept inspiration in terms of a plenary, verbally given inerrant Word of God.

- 2) What leg, indeed, does Prof. Harris Kaasa of Luther College have to stand on when he asks: "What is added to its authority (the Bible's) by insisting on inerrancy? Why does it need this man-made prop? Why can it not stand on its own authority?" Completely without foundation is his broad claim that from Biblical inerrancy "all other doctrines were deduced." (Theological Perspectives, 18)
- 3) In the opinion of Prof. Gerhard Forde verbal inspiration ipso facto leaves the impression "that faith is a matter of believing a number of doctrines" (Theological Perspectives, 67), that "Lutheran theology does not need the verbal inspiration method," and that in its place we ought to keep the "law-gospel method" because it "is better and more in accord with Scripture." (Ibid., 52) One need only ask where in Lutheran theology did he ever learn that "these two methods are quite different," as he says?
- 4) The same author makes the startling observation that there is no qualitative difference "between the inspiration of the Bible and the inspiration of the preaching of the Church." (Ibid., 65) Shades of the Vatican!
- 5) According to Prof. Wilfred Bunge: "On the face of things the gospels appear to be straightforward records of the life and teachings of Jesus. This they are not. . . They are filled with theological claims and confessions or interpretations which go far beyond the objective events of the history of Jesus." (Ibid., 42)

- 6) According to Prof. Olaf K. Storaasli: "The church in the first century had no such thing as a New Testament. . . . As long as the original apostles survived there was no need for written records of the life and words of Jesus. . . . As the church expanded, other teachers and preachers were used who had not been with Jesus, but they knew many of his sayings from what they heard. . . . So gradually the sayings and doings of Jesus as the fulfiller of the messianic promises came to be written down and circulated, . . . the product of the church." (Bible: Book of Faith, 103)

It is evident from the two preceding references that the New Testament is being looked upon as the product of the remembered and gradually assembled sayings of the believing community of the early church rather than the God-inspired account of the apostles. Thus it is not the actual words of Jesus with which we have to do in these accounts but the confession of the church which was reading back into history its faith and insights drawn from the resurrection of the Lord. The gospels are not objective chronicles of events but interpretations, confessions, theological claims and interpretations, out of all of which present-day theologians have to sift what actually happened and what was actually said.

It should be apparent that this procedure is like a greased slide. Once you are on it there is no turning back, no stopping. "Truth" in the four gospels, or any part of Scripture for that matter, is not factual truth as usually thought of. What Scripture presents as historical and factual material must pass through the sieve of form criticism and various theories concerning literary genres. Even that which remains will have to be "interpreted" as to its present significance, if any.

The opening chapters of Genesis, for example, become saga or myth, illustrations of some profound truth below the surface, frameworks within which God leaves a message. Where and when firm historical ground is reached, in chapter twelve of Genesis, the first chapter of Exodus, or later, no one knows for sure. Not even Jesus' testimony, because it occurs in the pious reporting of the early Christian community, insures Jonah's historicity, or the authorships of Moses and Isaiah. The chief message of the Old Testament is explained to be that "obedience means life and blessing; unfaithfulness brings God's judgment and death." (Bible: Book of Faith, 76) The Messianic prophecies meanwhile are no longer direct, predictive utterances, inspired of God like the text itself, but Sitz im Leben sayings which the church expanded in meaning as the centuries rolled on.

Admittedly, these are thoughts that disturb us and the whole church greatly. What has happened to bring Biblical theology within the Lutheran church to this pass in our day? Our Savior gave the answer, and it is always the same one in every day, the human predilection, ever since the Fall, of "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Luther's chief criticism of Erasmus was not his theology but his insolent attitude over against God's Word, and he fired point blank at this sore spot with the question: Would not everyone prefer to be a skeptic over against Holy Scripture? But then he reminded him solemnly: But the Holy Spirit is no skeptic! Put in equivalent terms today Luther's argument would be this: if the first premise is granted that the Bible is merely a human record of God's saving acts in history and not His inspired Word, then there is nothing to tie down the flighty spirit of man as he lords it over the Word with his "superior" insights and the "assured" results of scientific resource and investigation.

In concluding, it is good to be reminded that unity in the church is still served by purity of doctrine in spite of all insinuations to the contrary. It is still a case of both/and, not of either/or!

We agree no doubt that the kind of fellowship we seek with other Lutherans is not made, not even by executive action, or synod vote; it can only be recognized as being there where unity of faith and doctrine already exist. The role of Scripture is basic to every effort, the true Anknuepfungspunkt, as we have tried to show. Our fathers recognized this and for the sake of purity in Christian teaching bound themselves to it. It is right to claim: "SOLA SCRIPTURA is written on every page of the Confessions of the Lutheran Church." (Popular Symbolics, 2)

It is a principle to which all parties in the present fellowship negotiations must give honest and whole hearted assent, if their subscription to the Confessions is to mean anything at all. We have shown, regretfully, that there are reasons to doubt that the American Lutheran Church is actually in agreement with Missouri on this article at this time. We say this also with some pain, because we are aware that our own synodical officials have expressed this assurance. However, it is from that same source that we are now informed that it might have been well if the commissioners' who dealt with sola Scriptura would have met again and probed a little deeper into the problem areas before declaring a consensus. If this be so, then delay in the proceedings would appear to be the necessary executive responsibility and action.

It is simply a hard-nosed fact: Lutheran theology must express itself forthrightly, as also lovingly, on the sola Scriptura principle! This is all the more imperative in a day when so much obfuscation obtains on this vital article of faith. If we do not safeguard it against all comers, including some of the wrongful and un-Scriptural positions illustrated above, we shall find "at length. . . that pure doctrine is obscured and lost, and nothing is transmitted to posterity except academical opinions and suspensions of judgment." (Preface to the Book of Concord. Triglot, 23) Fail to assert this article, and we may rightly fear that the Christian faith is lost.

Eugene F. Klug

RESPONSE TO EUGENE KLUG'S PRESENTATION

SOLA SCRIPTURA: An Evaluation of The Lutheran Confessions and Sola Scriptura from "Essays Adopted by the Commissioners of the American Lutheran Church and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod," etc.

and

A critique of sundry theological views of Sola Scriptura from contemporary American Lutheran Church sources.

by
Fred Kramer

1. I do not know how Brother Klug's instructions read. I believe I understand his intentions in his presentation to be, to show that we cannot take statements from the ALC, also from the Commissioners, on Sola Scriptura at face value. If I am mistaken in this I fail to see the purpose of the lengthy quotations from ALC sources in the second part of his paper.
2. I did not receive this paper in time to check the correctness of his quotations, but believe that they are accurate. I will have a question here and there with respect to his use of the quotations, i.e., whether they were meant to say in each instance what he understands them to mean.
3. Pg. 1. The last full paragraph, and the paragraph which runs into pg. 2. Especially the latter:

It need hardly be stated that there is also much in and from ALC sources which could be cited to demonstrate that at many places there is also happy agreement with our position, etc.

I would add: The objectionable statements from ALC sources could be duplicated from our own side. We ought not to pretend that we have a solid front. What should be done about it is the question. Many people in the ALC welcome our "more solid" front and hope for help from it.
4. Pg. 2, 1. "God's Word is not only contained," etc. Sounds like a dogmatical lecture. I thought we should examine a document. I frankly find too much dogmatical lecture in the paper where I would look for a careful examination of the Commissioners' document.

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Pg. 3. How can the Scriptures possibly be "much more" than God's address to man?" What more is there?

Neo-orthodoxy is criticized for refusing to state categorically that the Scriptures are the revelation of God.

I would say that the demand to state this categorically is a demand that we misunderstand revelation. There was much revelation before there ever was Scripture.

There is much in Scripture that we should hesitate to call "revelation." Does it actually take revelation to report a hundred and one of the things that are written in the historical books? They were experienced and written down by eye and ear witness: "What we have seen, what we have heard, what our hands have handled of the Word of Life," etc.

These things were written down "by inspiration" as the Scripture itself testifies. Nowhere does the Scripture say that we have them by revelation.

Pg. 3, near bottom: "We must face the fact . . . that it may become God's Word under certain circumstances," etc. Has the essayist understood correctly what they mean? I can only refer to Karl Barth here, who is often quoted as teaching this nonsense. What I understand he is trying to say is that often the Scripture or preaching fails to get through to people, and then they do not experience it as the Word of God. And then, under favorable circumstances, it gets through to us. He calls this its becoming the Word of God to Us. Perhaps my ears are holier than his mouth at this point, but I do not think so. I believe I have understood him.

Pg. 4, middle paragraph. Criticism of Liefeld's statement: "We cannot do justice to God's working by limiting the idea of revelation solely to the content of the book . . . for it is not revelatory FOR US until we have heard Him speak...."

It may not be the best statement. But mark the words FOR US. He is talking about revelation as something that gets through to us. It never gets through to some people.

Same page: "A book of witness to the saving acts of God . . . than a book of intellectual truths about which we divisively argue." Now what, I ask, is wrong with that statement?

Pg. 5, last paragraph:

In Luther's book, as well as his spiritual heirs' thinking, the Confessors of 1580, plenary and verbal inspiration were the very ground and basis of the sola Scriptura principle.

This statement needs testing. The language is from the dogmaticians, not from the Confessions. This is not to say that the confessors held a "loose" view of Scripture, but it is a fact that the dogmaticians of the Seventeenth Century did some formulating to protect the Scriptural principle. Some stones in their wall were not of God's choosing. Vowel points. Arguing from antiquity of the Scripture, etc.

Pg. 6. Document gives tacit approval but

. . . could have been much more explicit about it, especially on the subject of the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture, etc.

Could have! Their purpose was to let the Confessions speak, not to write dogmatics.

Same pg.:

In what sense is the Scripture the Word of God? . . . We would be naive if we did not recognize that today, more often than not, it is a question which intends to throw an element of uncertainty into the arena concerning the relative importance and inspiration of some parts of Scripture, or the whole of it.

What does the essayist mean? Does he mean that all parts of Scripture are of equal importance? If so he is in conflict with Luther and with our seminary catalog. Does recognizing superior importance in some parts over others imply a difference in inspiration? This our fathers, who

fully recognized the difference in importance, stoutly denied. Properly so. But I have been accused in Europe of holding that, because all parts are equally inspired, all are of equal importance.

Pg. 6,7. Quanbeck. Certainly Quanbeck is properly criticized. But does Quanbeck's statement really deny that Scripture is the final authority in matters religious? And does the essayist's viewpoint equate the authority of Scripture with a certain understanding of inspiration? This is not said judgmentally, but with the request that we give this thought.

Pg. 9. I fail to see the value of the essayist's criticism. The Commissioners, I believe, state the facts correctly.

Pg. 10, at the bottom. The essayist calls this unlutheran and unscriptural, or at least curious (quote him exactly) when the Commissioners say:

Only from the perspective of sola Gratia can one properly speak of sola Scriptura in the sense of the Lutheran Symbols.

This wants careful consideration. The claim of divine inspiration is made not only by our sacred Scripture, but also by the Koran and by the Book of Mormon, -probably also by other so-called sacred books with which I, at least, am unfamiliar. How come we say to all the rest: Quod non! and accept it in the case of the sacred Scripture? Is it not because the sacred Scripture has spoken to us, because God has called us by the Gospel, which is set forth in this book? We cannot repudiate this book because we are Christians, because we have been called sola Gratia.

This means that I find the last sentence on the page unsatisfactory.

Pg. 11, middle paragraph: "Whether Law or Gospel, or their proper distinction, enter the picture or not."

I would like to ask for examples where they do not enter into the picture. I think the footnote on pg. 11 applies a statement of the Apology

in an unwarranted way to Genesis. The use of allegories by the Roman Catholics was, I believe, not quite on the same level as the attempt to treat the story of the fall, e.g., allegorically. This would warrant careful examination.

Pg. 12. "Was Christum treibet." How and when did Luther use this?

The last sentence on pg. 12. I do not see how this applies to the Commissioners' Document. It seems to me the essayist is going afield.

Pg. 15, below. The quote from the Commissioners' Document. Here the essayist scores. Very awkward. "While the confessions do not deny the infallibility of the Scripture as a whole. . . ."

Pg. 16, middle. It seems to me the essayist is straying far from the meaning of the Commissioners' Document. Extra-biblical tradition there, I find, refers to tradition as the Roman Catholics used it, traditions in the purer writings of antiquity, etc. The application made by the essayist seems to me to be beside the point.

Pg. 19, reference to Schiotz' statement. Remark: Herman Otten has done us an immense favor. He has reprinted the whole speech by Schiotz in this week's Christian News. I can only plead that we all read it without prejudice.

Pg. 20. Luther College, Theological Perspectives. I believe I heard Schiotz himself say that these professors were reprimanded. That won't change their minds, but it does show that they are not speaking officially for ALC.

A closing remark: It would be folly to insist that within the ALC all is well theologically. I have never believed this nor do I believe it today. At one time I believed that all was well, or at least pretty

well, theologically, in the Missouri Synod. Events have disillusioned me. We have leftists who go as far as any in the ALC, though percent-wise they may not be as numerous in Missouri as in the ALC. We also have extreme rightists who swear by the plenary, verbal inspiration and absolute inerrancy of the Scripture, but who do not seem ever to have learned what the Scripture is really about. They deny the spirit of the Gospel. Legalism has haunted the Lutheran Church in times past. It has haunted also the Missouri Synod. I hope I may not be compelled to compile a "Suendenregister" on that score. It could easily be done, and it would grow long.

To return to the Commissioners' Document on Sola Scriptura! By and large, I believe, it reflects the Confessions accurately. It has the surpassing virtue that it is not a legalistic document, but sets forth the heart of Scripture, the Gospel.

Also, the churches are not asked to declare fellowship on the basis of this document or of all three or four documents, but on the basis of the Lutheran Confessions.

Whether they can honestly do this, and whether they are willing honestly to do this, and then to work together on common problems, particularly in the area of the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scripture, this the synods must decide in convention.

Our task, as a theological faculty, so far as I can see, is not to tell the churches how to vote, but to help the churches to understand the issues. This means that we can on our part understand the issues ourselves and present them, not onesidedly, but from all sides, to our constituency, so that the children of God may decide the issue, whether to establish fellowship or not, on the basis of an informed conscience.